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Examination session (May or November)	MAY	Year	2015

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: HISTORY

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: To what extent did foreign involvement contribute toward the French defeat at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954?

Candidate's declaration

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The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

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Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

Overall _____ has produced a well researched and generally well argued extended essay. His interest in the topic was clear from the beginning in the initial conversations we had about the topic and evident in the final product. He was good at meeting deadlines and making useful changes to his essay based on my suggestions. The only notable stumble was on his first draft, where his writing style and structure were quite poor, but these were fixed in a reasonable amount of time. One might argue that he could be more clear in his argument. In his viva voce, it was clear that he liked the research aspect the most and that he struggled a bit more with the actual writing of the paper, which I told him was the case with most historians.

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To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

As per the section entitled "Responsibilities of the Supervisor" in the EE guide, the recommended number of hours spent with candidates is between 3 and 5 hours. Schools will be contacted when the number of hours is left blank, or where 0 hours are stated and there lacks an explanation. Schools will also be contacted in the event that number of hours spent is significantly excessive compared to the recommendation.

I spent 4 hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

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Date: 5 JANUARY 2015

Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Candidate session number		
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Criteria	Achievement level					
	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3	
A research question	<input type="text" value="2"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	
B introduction	<input type="text" value="2"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	
C investigation	<input type="text" value="4"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	
D knowledge and understanding	<input type="text" value="4"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	
E reasoned argument	<input type="text" value="4"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	
F analysis and evaluation	<input type="text" value="4"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	
G use of subject language	<input type="text" value="4"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	
H conclusion	<input type="text" value="2"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	
I formal presentation	<input type="text" value="4"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	
J abstract	<input type="text" value="2"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	2	<input type="text"/>	
K holistic judgment	<input type="text" value="4"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	4	<input type="text"/>	
Total out of 36	<input type="text" value="36"/>		<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	

Name of examiner 1: _____ Examiner number: _____
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International Baccalaureate Extended Essay

History

The Cold War in relation to the French at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu


To what extent did foreign involvement contribute toward the French defeat at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954? ✓

Word Count: 3996


Session: May 2015

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First and foremost, I would like to thank Mr. for his extensive support and motivation when I was feeling discouraged at times. Without his assistance and guidance, I wouldn't be able to compose this piece of work. Thank you,



I would also like to thank the Hong Kong Central Library for its materials and resources. I wouldn't be able to investigate my topic in depth without the assistance from the staff.



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*Abstract
should be
before Table
of contents.*

Abstract

The research question being investigated in this essay is "To what extent did foreign involvement contributed to the French defeat at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954?". To understand the cause and the course of the First Indochina war, the background in Indochina was briefly investigated and examined. For example, the French refusal to recognise the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as a free state in 1946 started the conflict. Furthermore, in light of the historical period that the First Indochina war was situated in, aspects of the Cold War, such as the involvement of foreign powers (United States vs the Communist bloc) were closely examined. This includes American policy on Communism between 1946-1953 and the Communist bloc's contributions during the First Indochina War (between 1949-1954). The Communist bloc is a common term used to describe Communist nations such as the Soviet Union, China, Czechoslovakia and so on. Finally, a comparison of French and Vietnamese operations during the battle of Dien Bien Phu (1953-1954) was presented to examine and weigh the importance of the French and Vietnamese tactical actions.

After conducting research that took different perspectives into consideration (such as Soviet, American, British, French, Vietnamese and Chinese perspectives) from various sources, a conclusion was reached, stating that to a great extent, foreign Communist intervention caused the French to lose at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. The overall Communist effort was more influential, both from foreign powers and local Vietnamese population who supported the Viet Minh. It effectively outweighed the contributions and efforts made by the French and her western allies. More importantly, the Communist efforts from both foreign powers and the local Vietnamese population seemingly made the French failures look insignificant at Dien Bien Phu.

Word Count: 292

J - see 3 elements are discussed 2/2

Introduction

The Battle of Dien Bien Phu that was fought during the First Indochina War ceased the French involvement in Indochina after they were defeated by the Viet Minh and Ho Chi Minh in 1954. Prior to the battle, the French government, lead by Vincent Auriol, faced public pressure to aim for peaceful negotiations with the Viet Minh to end the "dirty war".¹ Seen by the French as an opportunity to execute an honourable withdrawal from Indochina,² the valley of Dien Bien Phu was taken in 1953. In the end, having suffered total annihilation during the 56 day siege, they were defeated by the Viet Minh led by General Vo Nguyen Giap. It is important to understand what caused the French to lose the battle which was seen as politically significant for both the French and the Vietnamese not only because of the Geneva Conference that followed, but the development of the Cold War in general. During this five power conference which included the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, the United States and China, the conditions within the Korean Peninsula and Indochina was discussed.³ With the battle freshly won by General Vo Nguyen Giap and the Viet

¹ Marks, Frederick W. "The Real Hawk at Dienbienphu: Dulles or Eisenhower?" Pacific Historical Review 59.3 (1990): 300-09. Web.

² Dalloz, Jacques. The War in Indo-China 1945-54. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990. 158. Print.

³ Zhai, Qiang. China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina. 2000. 46. Print.

Minh, the battle was seen as an important bargaining chip for the Communists during the negotiations in the conference. More importantly, it allowed the Communists to gain an upper hand during the beginning of the Cold War. The First Indochina war was seen as a proxy war of the Cold War because the United States, the Soviet Union and China were either directly or indirectly involved through supplying war materiel or supplying limited amount of troops. The loss was valued highly by western major powers, most notably by the United States, mainly because the western powers lost its foothold in a decisive part of the world where there's a fear of growing Communism.

In this essay I aim to explore the differing perspectives in regard to the true causes for the French loss at Dien Bien Phu and come to a conclusion. The research question "To what extent did foreign involvement contribute to the French defeat at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954?" will be examined in this essay. In the research question, it is assumed that the foreign involvement directly influenced the outcome of the battle. However, other factors such as the French failures and the Viet Minh successes in the battle also played a role in determining the outcome of the battle. Hence, these factors will also be examined.

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A - Stated clearly in intro & on title page. 2/2
B - Covers all aspects 2/2.

Differences of foreign involvement during the First Indochina War(1949-1953)

The involvement of the international community played a crucial role in deciding the fate of the battle at Dien Bien Phu. As identified by historians Tai Sung An and Jacques Dalloz, the war was gradually developing into a major theatre for the Cold War.^{4 5} The contributions made by the First World and the Second World will be compared, considering the magnitude of the aid given and influence it had for the overall outcome of the battle.

Chinese Involvement

The role of Chinese aid was important for the Viet Minh military's development. According to Chinese historian Chen Jian's *China and the First Indochina War*, however, the Chinese contribution during the First Indochina war is often not fully understood and neglected.⁶ After winning the Chinese civil war and declaring a Communist China in 1949, Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh established a close relationship when an agreement was made which saw the immediate military assistance from the Chinese for the Vietnamese in January 1950.⁷ From April to September 1950 the Chinese delivered more than 14,000 guns, 1,700 machine guns, about 150 pieces of different types of cannons, 2,800 tons of grain, and large amounts of ammunition, medicine, uniforms and communication equipment.⁸ Jian's perspective sheds light on the level of Chinese

⁴ An, Tai Sung. *The Vietnam War*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1998. 33. Print.

⁵ Dalloz, Jacques. *The War in Indo-China 1945-54*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990. 133. Print.

⁶ Jian, Chen. "China and the First Indo-China War, 1950-54." *The China Quarterly* 133 (1993): 85. Web.

⁷ Ibid, 89.

⁸ Ibid, 94.

involvement through offering statistical figures. In addition, French historian Jacques Dalloz tends to agree that "the introduction of Chinese aid significantly change the balance of the war".⁹ ✓

The Chinese participation greatly benefited the Viet Minh as Ho Chi Minh suddenly had a friendly state that was ready for his disposal,¹⁰ removing him from the previous isolation from Communist countries and reassuring him. China was an important ally because she had large armies and was next to Vietnam, allowing China to protect Vietnam across the border. Moreover, Edgar O'Ballance also acknowledges that the Korean War China participated in 1950 decreased the amount of arm supplied to the Vietnamese.¹¹ After the end of the war, however, the aid continued and was reaching 3000 tonnes monthly, once again allowing the Viet Minh to attack without the fear of being undersupplied. It is evident that the effect of Chinese aid was extremely beneficial and crucial for Viet Minh operations in Dien Bien Phu when the Vietnamese waged a war of attrition. ✓

Chinese military influence was substantial and benefited the Viet Minh. The 250,000 Chinese soldiers across the border not only reassured the Vietnamese that the Chinese will intervene if necessary, but also stirred worry in the West as the conflict might provoke the Chinese to join on the side of the Vietnamese.¹² Not only did the Chinese aid the Viet Minh through war matériel, Chinese also struck fear in the Western powers through threatening to join the war, diminishing any real hope for a Western intervention to materialise. The Viet Minh had hence gained an upper hand with such a powerful ally standing behind their backs when compared to the isolated French who are fighting alone. This isolation would prove costly for the French at Dien Bien Phu as they were severely undersupplied and surrounded without any military assistance from her allies. ✓

Besides the crucial economic and military aid mentioned above, China also shared intelligence based on their experiences of success from the Korean war with the Vietnamese. According to Chinese historian Qiang Zhai, China utilised the sniping and fortification experiences they had gained during the Korean War and shared it with the Vietnamese.¹³ In addition, the Chinese supplied the Vietnamese with Chinese advisers that help trained the relatively inexperienced Viet Minh units. They were equally important in training inexperienced officers and battalions for the Viet Minh, allowing the growth of a modern army capable of fighting and fending off the French. The effects of such trainings was evident at Dien Bien Phu as the Vietnamese defeated the French who had superior weaponry. However, it can also be argued that the Vietnamese won solely because they outnumbered the French 4 to 1 with the influx of Chinese soldiers and artillery units. These army units are an example of how the Communist bloc's aid changed the balance of the war in favour of the Vietnamese. ✓ *analysis*

⁹ Dalloz, Jacques. *The War in Indo-China 1945-54*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990. 129. Print.

¹⁰ O'Ballance, Edgar. *The Indo-China War, 1945-1954, a Study in Guerilla Warfare*. London: Faber and Faber, 1964. 104. Print.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 141.

¹² Lawrence, Mark Atwood. *The Vietnam War*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001. 43. Print.

¹³ Zhai, Qiang. *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 2000. 47. Print.

Soviet Involvement

On the other hand, the Soviets were less concerned than other nations mainly because it considered the Communist movement in Vietnam weak.¹⁴ Hence, it can be understood that Soviet aid to the Vietnamese is relatively smaller when compared to the Chinese's aid, who delivered the majority of the weapons and ammunition.¹⁵ However, other historians tend to disagree with Gaiduk's statement on the Soviet Union's contributions. For instance, O'Ballance argues that Communist bloc military and economic aid of \$500 million was formed to help fight the French.¹⁶ This further supports military historian Bernard Fall's claim that by 1954, there was a massive influx of Chinese and Soviet support.¹⁷ With the Communist bloc providing astronomical amount of economic and military aid, it contrasts with the aid that was given to the French by the First World and greatly benefited the Vietnamese in Dien Bien Phu.

United States Involvement

Prior to the start of the war, the United States had a clear and strong stance when dealing with Communism. The Roosevelt administration opposed French colonialism and its suppression of the Communist guerrilla forces due to the idea of self-determination that was introduced in the Atlantic Charter in 1941. However, after Truman assumed office in 1945 the United States became increasingly aware of the spreading of Communism and looked at policies to help address the growing concern of a global Communist movement. The Truman administration introduced the Containment policy in 1946 and the Marshall Plan in 1947 in an attempt to limit Communist influence.¹⁸ In a speech made by President Truman on March 12, 1947, the United States declared that they were prepared to step in with political or military aid any place where Communist led movements threatened to overturn governments friendly to the United States.¹⁹ Having declared that they were fighting Communism instead of a colonial struggle, the French received massive American economic aid.

The United States was provided massive economic aid to the French which was beneficial and crucial for the French to carry on fighting in Vietnam. As historian Maurice Isserman claims, the United States was providing \$3 billion of aid to the French, covering 80% of the French total costs for the war.²⁰ His remark is hence valuable because it gives insight of the magnitude of American aid for the French in Indochina. Insisting his "domino theory", the Eisenhower administration was also aware of the vulnerability of the Asia Pacific region to Communist control if Indochina fell as the Korean War deteriorated the First World-Second World relationship.²¹ President Eisenhower was willing to further increase United States' participation in Indochina through possibly intervening militarily in 1952. According to historian Morris Morley, the planned Operation Vulture involved the use of about 60 B-29 bombers, 150 American carrier-based fighters, and possible tactical atomic bombs against the Vietminh forces surrounding Dien Bien Phu.²² However, he was met with military and political restraints when the Joint Chiefs of Staff, led by Arthur Radford, and the US Congress opted against Eisenhower's objectives. These constraints

¹⁴ Gaïduk, I. V. The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War. Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1996. Print.

¹⁵ Ibid, 6.

¹⁶ O'Ballance, Edgar. The Indo-China War, 1945-1954, a Study in Guerilla Warfare. London: Faber and Faber, 1964. 230. Print.

¹⁷ Fall, Bernard B. Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1967. 48. Print.

¹⁸ Lawrence, Mark Atwood. The Vietnam War. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001. 37. Print.

¹⁹ Isserman, Maurice. "Background to America's Longest War." The Vietnam War. New York: Facts on File, 1992. 15. Print.

²⁰ Ibid, 16.

²¹ Petras, James. "Nuclear War and US-Second World Relations: The Neglected Dimension." Economic and Political Weekly 23.4 (1988): 153.

²² Ibid, 153.

proved costly as it decreased the French chances of receiving any military help from the United States. The real effect can be observed when the French were hopelessly surrounded and undersupplied in Dien Bien Phu. Perhaps an American military intervention could have turned the tides around and cut French losses.

Could be developed.
Interesting point

American contribution contrasts sharply with the Communist bloc's contributions as the Vietnamese were receiving massive economic and military aid. According to historian Frederick Marks, the Secretary of State John Foster Dulles believed that there was no need for the United States to intervene. National security was not at risk and intervention might not have saved Dien Bien Phu.²³ In addition, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Arthur Radford opposed military intervention in the form of air strikes as proposed by Eisenhower, mainly because he believed the air strikes will lead to a direct American intervention with ground forces.²⁴ The uncertainty of being the sole fighting force in Indochina, on top of a possible massive injection of American personnel, discouraged the Americans to offer any serious military aid to the French. Therefore, both Dulles and Radford proposed the idea of "United Action",²⁵ where the British and other European nations join in on a multinational military initiative.²⁶ Unlike the strong American wartime economy, the British hesitated and proceeded with caution. As shown in historian Geoffrey Warner's *Escalation in Vietnam: Precedents of 1954*, in a letter written by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to Eisenhower,²⁷ the letter "showed that the British had little enthusiasm for joining us in taking a firm position.", effectively ending any hopes of a joint intervention to assist the French.

The First World cooperation contrasts sharply with the Communist bloc's cooperation where massive aid, both economic and military aid, was given to the Vietnamese. Not only does Warner shed light on the British attitude towards the war, it also allows comparison between the passive British-American attitude and the proactive Communist bloc attitude. Without advanced military equipment, French historian Jacques Dalloz agrees that the Viet Minh outclassed the French in Dien Bien Phu. The Vietnamese were well equipped by the weapons recovered from the Kuomintang during the Chinese Civil War, which were all supplied by the United States.²⁸ In addition, the Communist bloc such as China, Soviet Russia and Czechoslovakia supplied arms as well, outclassing the French arms. This source holds a value of giving an insight of the quality of arms supplied to the Vietnamese from the Communist bloc, allowing meaningful comparison between the magnitude of contributions from the First World and Second World.

All in all, there was a striking difference between the contributions from the First World and the Second World. With the United States acting alone without receiving support from its long time ally United Kingdom, the economic aid, despite the large sum of \$3 billion, was minimal compared to the Soviet and Chinese contributions, where both massive economic and military aid was given. The lack of advanced military equipment as well as military training and intelligence proved decisive during the preparations of the Battle of Dien Bien Phu.

Interesting points

²³ Marks, Frederick W. "The Real Hawk at Dienbienphu: Dulles or Eisenhower?" *Pacific Historical Review* 59.3 (1990): 305. Web.

²⁴ Ibid, 307.

²⁵ Ibid, 302.

²⁶ Lawrence, Mark Atwood. *The Vietnam War*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001. 46. Print.

²⁷ Warner, Geoffrey. "Escalation in Vietnam: The Precedents of 1954." *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 41.2 (1965): 73. JSTOR. Web.

²⁸ Dalloz, Jacques. *The War in Indo-China 1945-54*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990. 145. Print.

Comparison of the French and Vietnamese Operations during the Battle of Dien Bien Phu (1953-1954)

In the eyes of the French, Dien Bien Phu was strategically important. General Navarre initiated Operation Castor between November 20 and 23, 1953 which saw the capture of Dien Bien Phu, a remote valley deep in Viet Minh controlled North Vietnam. Having sustained minimal resistance from the local Viet Minh units, Navarre finally accepted to battle the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu on December 3, 1953.²⁹ Besides the differences of aid received by the French and the Vietnamese as mentioned above, other factors such as preparations and the method of fighting will be examined and compared.

French Failures

Dien Bien Phu was strategically important as Laos was 10 miles away across the border.³⁰ According to Vietnamese historian Tai Sung An, in 1953 and 1954 regular Viet Minh forces invaded Laos and Cambodia to help the Pathet Lao in Laos and Khmer Communist in Cambodia resistance to establish strongholds.³¹ Stirring unrest in the Associated States, the French were determined to prevent these invasions from happening in the future. The entrenched camp, lying at the valley floor of Dien Bien Phu,³² was overlooked by the Viet Minh forces stationed in the surrounding mountains where they were able to perform continuous reconnaissance missions while the French were completely exposed.³³ The French poor geographical position effectively allowed General Vo Nguyen Giap and the Vietnamese to anticipate and observe the French every action, allowing the Vietnamese to adjust their battle plans according to the French weak points.

The fairly smooth retreat in Na San August 1953 influenced Navarre into believing that there weren't any risks in maintaining French bases that were far from the Delta perimeter.³⁴ This in return motivated his decision to occupy and fight at Dien Bien Phu without putting great emphasis on the difficulties of supplying the base. Due to the remoteness of Dien Bien Phu, the base relied completely on supplies delivered by the air force.³⁵ Land routes were not maintained for an extended period of time and were deep in Viet Minh controlled territories,³⁶ so land routes were not desired. In fact, the French air force only had a total of 75 aircrafts, causing an overextension of their services and making it comparatively weak.³⁷ This source holds the value of outlining the French weaknesses that increased their odds of losing the battle. Moreover, a single decisive blow to the airstrips through Viet Minh artillery would effectively paralyse incoming supplies and more importantly, which was the only feasible retreat route.

Furthermore, French intelligence continuously underestimated the Viet Minh in terms of the amount of troops and armaments they possessed.³⁸ The French gambled that the Viet Minh would never bring enough soldiers to the battle to engage with the 12,000 troops stationed in the base. In

²⁹ Fall, Bernard B. *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1967. 44. Print.

³⁰ Logevall, Fredrik. *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*. New York: Random House, 2012. 381. Print.

³¹ An, Tai Sung. *The Vietnam War*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1998. 32. Print.

³² Lawrence, Mark Atwood. *The Vietnam War*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001. 44. Print.

³³ Stanley, George F. G. "Dien Bien Phu in Retrospect." *International Journal* 10.1 (1954): 38.

³⁴ O'Ballance, Edgar. *The Indo-China War, 1945-1954, a Study in Guerilla Warfare*. London: Faber and Faber, 1964. 207. Print.

³⁵ Morgan, Ted. *Valley of Death: The Tragedy at Dien Bien Phu That Led America into the Vietnam War*. New York: Random House, 2010. 238. Print.

³⁶ Prados, John. *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War*. Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1995. 5. Print.

³⁷ O'Ballance, Edgar. *The Indo-China War, 1945-1954, a Study in Guerilla Warfare*. London: Faber and Faber, 1964. 210. Print.

³⁸ Stanley, George F. G. "Dien Bien Phu in Retrospect." *International Journal* 10.1 (1954): 40.

reality, the Viet Minh had more than 50,000 well armed troops who surrounded Dien Bien Phu,³⁹ which outnumbered the French 4 to 1.⁴⁰ As highlighted by historian Bernard Fall, the underestimation of the Viet Minh's capabilities was perhaps the only real error made by the French.⁴¹ This is accurate as Navarre would probably evacuate his forces if he knew they were outnumbered by such a great margin. In fact, Bernard Fall further stated Navarre still had the chance to withdraw from Dien Bien Phu completely through airlift during the first week of December 1953.⁴² The fate of Dien Bien Phu was already sealed by the time Navarre decided to wage a pitched battle against the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu against all odds instead of withdrawing. In fact, Bernard Fall seemingly agrees that instead of being a daring but safe play, it was a desperate gamble made by the French,⁴³ which I think is correct. ✓

Besides the tactical failures, the French government was also facing increasing pressure from the public. The French, having suffered 100,000 casualties during the course of the war,⁴⁴ was facing increasing opposition to the war. The French people were tired and they had little commitment to this dirty, far-off war.⁴⁵ According John Prado's *Assessing Dien Bien Phu*, in an informal poll carried out in 1954, 18% of the population favoured complete withdrawal, where 42% favoured negotiations. Interestingly, 29% expressed no opinion revealed the lack of interest the French people had for the war in Indochina.⁴⁶ Although this source holds the value of revealing the level of discontent among the French people, it also holds the possible limitation of including manipulated statistics. In the eyes of historian Don Oberdorfer, the French lost not because of military power but because the French became convinced they could never win.⁴⁷ In order to win a war, the public would have to give their full support to the war effort. However, in the case of Dien Bien Phu, the public wanted to cease their participation in a seemingly pointless war the French are fighting in. ✓ *evaluation*

Vietnamese Successes

The Vietnamese won at Dien Bien Phu mainly because it had friendly foreign aid from the Communist bloc which contrasts with the minimal aid given to the French. However, the Vietnamese should also be credited for their effort of waging a convincing battle against the French. As described by Historian G.F. Stanley, the Viet Minh were well equipped with Chinese and Russian field artillery, mortars and recoil-less guns.⁴⁸ The Vietnamese were able to disable the French airstrip within two weeks of the battle through accurate artillery fire,⁴⁹ plaguing the French long lasting effects as described by historian Qiang Zhai. The availability of these weapons effectively dictated the overall outcome and fate of Dien Bien Phu in favour of the Viet Minh. The paralysing of the French air strips made the 12,000 French troop isolated and vulnerable to future attacks.⁵⁰ This paved way for the success of future Communists offensives and subsequent victories. Moreover, hidden and concealed deep in the forests and mountains,⁵¹ it made it hard for the French ✓

³⁹ Lawrence, Mark Atwood. *The Vietnam War*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001. 45. Print.

⁴⁰ Davidson, Phillip B. *Vietnam at War: The History, 1946-1975*. Novato, CA: Presidio, 1988. 224. Print

⁴¹ Fall, Bernard B. *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1967. 50. Print.

⁴² Ibid, 48.

⁴³ Ibid, 49.

⁴⁴ Corfield, Justin J. *The History of Vietnam*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008. 51. Print.

⁴⁵ Oberdorfer, Don. *Tet!* Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971. 50. Print.

⁴⁶ Prados, John. "Assessing Dien Bien Phu." *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis*. Ed. Mark Atwood. Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007. 217. Print.

⁴⁷ Oberdorfer, Don. *Tet!* Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971. 49. Print.

⁴⁸ Stanley, George F. G. "Dien Bien Phu in Retrospect." *International Journal* 10.1 (1954): 40.

⁴⁹ Lawrence, Mark Atwood. *The Vietnam War*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001. 45. Print.

⁵⁰ Zhai, Qiang. *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 2000. 49. Print.

⁵¹ Summers, Harry G. "Dien Bien Phu & Dulles." *Vietnam War Almanac*. New York, NY: Facts on File, 1985. 141. Print.

air force to destroy these artillery pieces. With this accurate use of artillery, not only does it effectively cut off the French from supplies and reinforcements, it also blocks off the only way out of Dien Bien Phu. In addition, the anti-aircraft units effectively increased the difficulty for the French to deliver the supplies accurately. As described by historian Justin Corfield, in order to avoid Viet Minh anti-air guns, French air force had to fly high and drop supplies. These supply drops often landed in Viet Minh hands and increased their already abundant military supplies.⁵² The above sources all hold the value of offering a neutral point of view on the Vietnamese operations, mainly because the authors are not culturally or psychologically attached to Vietnam. Hence, these arguments seem reasonable when considering at the same time the French failures mentioned above. The closure of the air strip had made a great impact in both the French ability to wage a long lasting battle and the ability to bring in reinforcements. As mentioned by Colonel Charles Piroth, who was deputy in command in Dien Bien Phu, he had realised that the battle will be decided on artillery.⁵³ Viet Minh's artillery had decided the fate of Dien Bien Phu when the main airstrip was disabled, denying the French vital supplies and reinforcements. Compared to the French, the Vietnamese didn't worry about diminishing troops. First of all, reinforcements can be easily brought to Dien Bien Phu as the battle was in Viet Minh controlled Northern Vietnam. In addition, the Chinese stationed 250,000 troops across the border in Yunnan. With the newly constructed motor ways, it would be easy for the Vietnamese to bring in more troops if necessary. This fact gave Viet Minh soldiers a major confidence and morale boost.

On top of that fact, the Viet Minh had overall strategic dominance over the French in North Vietnam where they had major influences. The Viet Minh, having won the popular support of the people, could operate openly without the fear of being betrayed by the local people whereas the French would immediately be reported to the Viet Minh.⁵⁴ Moreover, during the three months of preparations, large numbers of local villagers built roads for the Communists to bring their weapons to the battle zone.⁵⁵ Without the help of these local villagers, the weapons, such as the artillery that proved decisive, would not have been transported and brought up to the mountains. Hence, the popular support for the Viet Minh should also be taken into consideration as an important factor that dictated the outcome of the battle.

Without the equipment donated by the Communist bloc and the experience shared by the Chinese, the Vietnamese wouldn't be able to wage an effective and convincing war against the French. However, without using and protecting the equipment intelligently, the Vietnamese wouldn't have won the battle either. Hence, the Vietnamese should receive an equal amount of praise for their efforts during the battle. The Vietnamese had taunted the French with its guerrilla warfare since 1950. It had gained an unexpected territorial advantage when the French mistakenly located its base on the valley floor, which was surrounded by the mountains overlooking the base. In addition, the Vietnamese determination to attack and destroy the airstrip further allowed them to gain an upper hand in the battle, as the French were bound to be undersupplied and dispirited. Finally, its anti-aircraft guns ceased any feasible opportunities to resupply the French as it threatened to shoot down French aircrafts, diminishing any real hopes for a French victory at Dien Bien Phu. All in all, the Vietnamese were able to capitalise from the French failures and use it to their own advantage, while at the same time being able to produce advantages that were beneficial for them.

⁵² Corfield, Justin J. *The History of Vietnam*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008. 53. Print.

⁵³ Ibid, 52.

⁵⁴ Isserman, Maurice. "Background to America's Longest War." *The Vietnam War*. New York: Facts on File, 1992. 15. Print.

⁵⁵ Corfield, Justin J. *The History of Vietnam*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2008. 53. Print.

Conclusion

As examined, the role of foreign intervention proved to be the turning point for the overall development of the First Indochina War. When considering the causes for the reasons behind the French defeat, the assistance that it received from western powers proved to be influential and decisive. Without the proper military equipment and an adequate number of troops available for the war, the French were let down by their western allies and already lost the battle before the war even began. Compared to the well equipped, well trained and well supported Viet Minh troops, the French were stranded, undersupplied and tired of the war of attrition and ambushes initiated by the Communists.⁵⁶

As set forth in the introduction, the aim of this essay is to examine "To what extent did foreign involvement contributed to the French defeat at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954?" In response to this question, I believe that the foreign involvement contributed most to the outcome of the battle. However, I also believe that the overall Communist effort from the local population who supported the Viet Minh and the Viet Minh army, should be credited for their contributions. Both the Communist bloc and the Viet Minh's efforts outweighed the contributions and efforts made by the French and her western allies. More importantly, it overshadowed the French failures and made it look insignificant when compared to the Communist efforts.

H - Clear + consistent
2/2

⁵⁶ An, Tai Sung. The Vietnam War. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1998. 32. Print.

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A - 2

B - 2

C - Imaginative range 4

D - V. good + locates investigation
in academic context 4

E - Convincing. 4

F - Effective. 4

G - 4

H - 2

I - 4

J - 2

K - 4